

## AN ADDITIONAL NOTE ON THE BIRDS OF LORD HOWE AND NORFOLK ISLANDS.

BY TOM IREDALE.

*(Communicated by A. F. Basset Hull).*

My study of the avifauna of the Kermadec Islands necessitated reference to literature dealing more especially with Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands. I have received from my friend, Mr. A. F. Basset Hull, his account of the Birds of Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands (Proc. Linn. Soc. N. S. Wales, 1909, Vol. xxxiv, pp. 636 et seq.).

As almost all the earlier accounts of these birds are contained in scarce books, I have ventured to bring them together, and offer this as an appendix to Mr. Hull's paper. Whilst so doing, I have noted some discrepancies which seem to me to point to the solution of some matters hitherto in dispute.

There is a brief reference to pigeons, parrots, parroquets, and rails in Cook's "Voyages," (Vol. ii., p. 148, 1777), in the account of the discovery of Norfolk Island. In Hunter's "Historical Account of Port Jackson" &c., 1793, Lieut. King's journal is reproduced. Regarding Norfolk Island, he writes "On our first landing we found a great number of pigeons, which were so tame that we knocked them down with sticks; but latterly they quitted the low boughs, and generally harboured about the tops of the pines. When plucked and drawn they weighed from three-quarters to one pound each. The parrots are numerous, and the ugliest bird of the kind I ever heard of; this added to the harshness of their note, makes them a very disagreeable bird. The parroquets are entirely green, except a tuft on their head. Hawks are numerous, and of two kinds, the grey and blue. . . . Quails and curlews are plentiful, but very shy. The owls, which

have very handsome plumage, make a noise like one man calling to another, and they pronounce the word 'yaho' very distinctly. . . . There are also a species of birds which burrow in the ground like rabbits, where they hatch their eggs and rear their young; they are web-footed, which is rather extraordinary, and their bill is like that of other sea-fowl, but they have not the least fishy taste, and their flesh is very fine. These birds never quit their holes till sunset, from which time until midnight the air is full of them; they afforded us many fresh meals." Immediately succeeding, Captain Hunter was wrecked on Norfolk Island, and in the same work he writes(p. 181) "In the month of April we found that Mount Pitt, which is the highest ground on the Island, was during the night crowded with birds. This hill is as full of holes as any rabbit warren; in these holes at this season these birds burrow and make their nests, and as they are an aquatic bird they are, during the daytime, frequently at sea in search of food. As soon as it is dark they hover in vast flocks over the ground where their nests are. Our people(I mean seamen, marines and convicts) who are sent out in parties to provide birds for the general benefit, arrive upon the ground soon after dusk, where they light small fires which attract the attention of the birds, and they drop down out of the air as fast as the people can take them up and kill them. When they are upon the ground the length of their wings prevents their being able to rise, and until they can ascend an eminence they are unable to recover the use of their wings. For this purpose nature has provided them with a strong, sharp and hooked bill, and in their heel a sharp spur, with the assistance of which, and the strength of their bill, they have been seen to climb the stalk of a tree sufficiently high to throw themselves upon the wing. . . . They are web-footed, and of a rusty black colour. . . . They lay but one egg, and that is full as large as a duck's egg. They were at the end of May as plentiful as if none had been caught, although for two months before there had not been less taken than from two to three thousand birds every night. Most of the females taken in May were with egg, which really fills the whole cavity

of the body, and is so heavy that I think it must fatigue the bird much in flying. This *Bird of Providence*, which I may with great propriety call it, appeared to me to resemble that seabird in England called the puffin; they had a strong fishy taste, but our keen appetites relished them very well; the eggs were excellent." As a footnote is added "For a further description, and an engraving of this bird, see the Norfolk Island Petrel in Phillip's 'Voyage,' 4to edition."

In White's "Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales" (1790) we have the discovery of Lord Howe Island chronicled, and get the following account of the birds (p. 135) :—"They also found on it in great plenty a kind of fowl, resembling much the Guinea Fowl in shape and size, but widely different in colour, they being in general all white, with a red fleshy substance rising, like a cock's comb, from the head, and not unlike a piece of sealing-wax. These not being birds of flight, nor in the least wild, the sailors availing themselves of their gentleness and inability to take wing from their pursuits, easily struck them down with sticks." On p. 238 is described The White Fulica, *Fulica alba*, accompanied by a good figure.

More often quoted has been Phillip's "Voyage to Botany Bay." This was published by T. Stockdale, in 1789, and is a compilation probably edited by the publisher. These accounts differ in details from the ones I have quoted, and I believe this is due to the editing. On p. 91, regarding Norfolk Island, is written :—"The woods are inhabited by innumerable tribes of birds, many of them very gay in plumage. The most useful are pigeons, which are very numerous, and a bird not unlike the Guinea fowl, except in colour (being chiefly white), both of which were at first so tame as to suffer themselves to be taken by hand." On p. 182, where the discovery of Lord Howe Island is chronicled, is found :—"On the shore there are plenty of ganets, and a land fowl of a dusky brown colour, with a bill about four inches long, and feet like those of a chicken. . . . There are also many very large pigeons, and the white birds, resembling the Guinea fowl, which were found at Norfolk Island, were seen here also in great num-

bers. The bill of this bird is red and very strong, thick and sharp pointed." On p. 225 is given Lieut. Watts's account of the discovery of Lord Howe Island, and amongst the birds are listed "a new species, apparently, of the coote, and also of the rail." On p. 250, Captain Marshall, who called at Lord Howe Island, refers to a bird "somewhat resembling a Guinea-hen." On p. 161 is described the Norfolk Island Petrel, about which is written :— "This inhabits Norfolk Island, and burrows in the sand like a rabbit, lying hid in the holes throughout the day, and coming out of evenings in quest of food. This bird appears to differ so very little from the *dark grey Petrel* of Cook's "Voyage," (Vol. i., p. 258), that it is not improbable that it may prove to be the same species. This is described in the "General Synopsis of Birds," (Vol. vi., p.399), under the name of *Grey Petrel*." A Plate is given, which suggests *Oestrelata*, though the description agrees better with *Puffinus griseus* Gm.; of this, more later. On p.273 the White Gallinule is described as from Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island, and other places," and is accompanied by a plate.

In Collins' "Account of the English Colony in New South Wales,"(1798, p.23), we have :—"I[Lord Howe Island] abounded with a new species of fowl, and a small brown bird, the flesh of which was very fine eating."

Much has been written about the White Gallinule, but I contend that a perusal of the preceding implies that it occurred solely on Lord Howe Island, and that the Norfolk Island habitat, introduced by the editor of Phillip's "Voyage," is erroneous. In favor of this view we have, first, Captain Cook does not notice it; Lieut. King, in Hunter's "Historical Account," does not mention it; and then Hunter himself, recording the lack of food, and the finding of the "Bird of Providence," has nothing to say regarding it. Surely it is feasible to suppose that a starving man would have had some remarks to make about it. Lieut. King gives quite a detailed account of the avifauna without a word of it; and it is worth pointing out that, when it is introduced as an inhabitant of Norfolk Island in Phillip's "Voyage," it is in a summary of King's papers. In Hill's "Lord Howe Island,"(p.8),

this is quoted as "King's despatches from Norfolk Island." I feel certain that the Norfolk Island habitat given in that place is an error, as the only other time it is referred to is later on in the same work, where obviously it is the editor's words. On the other hand, every visitor to Lord Howe Island was impressed by it and referred to it; and, though all the writers had visited Norfolk Island, they write of it as a new bird. Here again it must be observed that the discovery of Lord Howe Island was made on a trip to Norfolk Island, and thus a garbled account could easily be produced. In this way I believe that the Norfolk Island labels on some Lord Howe birds have been produced. Thus, when the name *Gallinula alba* was given to the White Gallinule of Phillip's "Voyage" by Latham (Index Ornith. ii., p.768, 1790) the habitat is incorrectly shortened to "Norfolk Island." In the "General Synopsis, Supplement ii., (p. 327), 1802," Latham adds White's name to the synonymy, amends his description to cover White's details, yet retains "Norfolk Island" as the sole habitat. Von Pelzeln states that White's type was labelled "Norfolk Island." That bird was figured in the "Ibis" (1873, p.295). The skin is preserved in Vienna. The only other specimen known is in the Liverpool Museum. Rowley, in the "Ornithological Miscellany" (Vol. i., p.37, 1875), figures the latter as *Porphyrio stanleyi*, and gives a good historical account of the White Gallinule. H. O. Forbes (Bull. Liverpool Museum, Vol. ii., 1901, p.62) has re-examined the Liverpool specimen, and asserts its identity with the Vienna bird. In that paper some statements are made which seem incompatible with the habitat of Lord Howe Island. The history to me seems incomplete, but Forbes accepts the statement that it was "brought by Sir J. Banks," "New Zealand rare," and consequently it must have reached this country in June, 1771. I doubt this, and find confirmation in Forbes' own words:—"Unlike most of the birds brought home by Captain Cook it was not mummified;" and later, "it is evident its pose was modelled from the Plate of the White Gallinule drawn by Miss Stone for White's Journal published in 1790." This suggests that the data, "brought by Sir J. Banks"

are incorrect; and, from the evidence I have put forward, that the bird was confined to Lord Howe Island. In "Extinct Birds" (1907, p.143), Rothschild separates the two birds, calling the Liverpool bird *Notornis stanleyi* Rowley, and identifying it with the White Gallinule of Phillip's "Voyage," restricting it to Lord Howe Island; the Vienna specimen he recognises as *Notornis alba* White, and assumes that it lived only on Norfolk Island, as White gave no locality. But I have quoted the text of White's "Journal," where he gives an account of it on Lord Howe Island, so that it would seem White's bird came from that locality, though afterwards labelled "Norfolk Island." I conclude that, upon the preceding reports, the only habitat to be assigned to the White Gallinule is Lord Howe Island, and, therefore, *Fulica alba* White, *Gallinula alba* Latham, and *Porphyrio stanleyi* Rowley, are synonymous. Reference to the Watling drawings seems to support this view. No. 258 is of a totally white bird, and Watling wrote "one-third its natural size. This bird is of Howe Island, and when young is entirely black, from that to a blueish grey, and from that to an entire white. This bird feeds itself with its feet like a Parrot," and later he added "White Gallinule complete, Latham Syn. Suppt. 2, p.327." No. 259 was first described by Watling as "Three stages of this Bird taken at Lord Howes Island before it arrives to maturity," and later is added "Three changes of the White Gallinule, Latham, Syn. Suppt. 2, p.327." Here is figured a blackish bird, a blackish bird with the breast blue, and a pure white bird. It will be noted that the only habitat given is Lord Howe Island. These figures prejudiced Latham to the view that the white birds were probably only albinos of the Purple Gallinule, but a consideration of the literature altogether discredits that conclusion.

The Watling drawings also provide the solution of the identity of the Norfolk Island Petrel. No. 280 represents a Puffinus; the legs and feet are yellowish-green, the claws black, the bill is blackish at the tip, otherwise yellowish-green or horn-colour. Watling, when he drew it, wrote "Norfolk Island. The Mutton-bird, in full feather." Later he added between "Norfolk Island"

and "The Mutton-bird" the words "Petrel or," and at the bottom, "Norfolk Island Petrel, Phillip's Voyages, pl. 10, p.161, Latham Syn. 2, p.334." No. 281 is a drawing of a similar bird with all the breast and abdomen covered with grey down; Watling's original note reads "Norfolk Island Mutton Bird in second or middle state." Here again is inserted "Petrel or" between "Norfolk Island" and "Mutton Bird," and there is added "Norfolk Island or Fuliginous Petrel a Young Bird, Latham Syn. Suppt. 2, p.334. No. 282 is of a bird with a black bill and feet, and suggests *Oestrelata* rather than *Puffinus*; it is obviously not the same as the two preceding, and just as clearly the same as the Petrel figured in Phillip's "Voyage," where, however, the legs are differently coloured and described. Watling originally wrote "A Norfolk Island Bird." Later he added "Fuliginous Petrel, Latham, Syn. Suppt. 2, p.334;" but that species appears on p.333, and is *Majaqueus aequinoctialis* Linné.

The history and identification of the Watling drawings will be found in the "History of the Collections of Natural History in the British Museum" (Vol. ii, 1906). As preface to the drawings, is a "Catalogue of Drawings of Birds, referring to my General Synopsis of Birds," and above this heading is a note "N.B. This Catalogue was wrote by Dr. Latham, author of the General Synopsis of Birds." Of this note Dr. Sharpe says, "probably in the handwriting of Mr. James Lee himself"; but it is certainly Watling's. Every letter agrees with the writing on the drawings correctly assigned to Watling, as evidenced by his signature.

In this Catalogue appears "280-1-2, Norfolk Island Petrel. Sup.2,334," showing that Latham confused the *Puffinus* and *Oestrelata*. Of 280, Dr. Sharpe wrote (p.152) "This figure is in my opinion intended to represent *Puffinus chlororhynchus* Less., to which it bears a very strong resemblance. If I am correct in this supposition, the 'Norfolk Island Petrel' of Latham cannot be referred to the *Oestrelata neglecta* Schl., as has been suggested in the Catalogue of Birds (xxv., p.412)." In making this suggestion, Dr. Sharpe has overlooked the description where the tail



is stated to be "rounded." This divorces it from *P. chlororhynchus* Less., and suggests *P. griseus* Gm., which is emphasised by the description and figuration of the coloration of the soft parts. To clinch this argument, we have the fact that *Puffinus griseus* Gm., still breeds about the typical locality.

No.282, Dr. Sharpe would identify with *P. tenuirostris* Temm., but it is undoubtedly a figure of the *Oestrelata* still breeding on Norfolk Island. Here again we have the fact that *Puffinus tenuirostris* Temm., does not breed on Norfolk Island, whilst there is an *Oestrelata* agreeing well with the figure. The conflicting accounts of the early writers are now easily reconciled. To *Oestrelata* sp., may be assigned "they have not the least fishy taste, and their flesh is very fine. These birds never quit their holes till sunset," given by King; whilst Hunter's account of the method of catching would apply better to *P. griseus* Gm.; and his report of their climbing habits might refer to *Oestrelata* sp.; the size of the egg and the strong fishy taste are more applicable to *P. griseus* Gm. The time of breeding is noteworthy. Mr. Hull(p.649) notes the Lord Howe Island Petrel as breeding in July-August, whilst the Norfolk Island Petrel is said to breed in January(North, "Nests and Eggs," p.416). As *Puffinus griseus* Gm., breeds at Norfolk Island in December, further investigation is necessary to clear up this point. One thing is, however, certain, and that is that the *Oestrelata* that burrows on Norfolk Island must bear the name *Oestrelata phillipi* Gray, and it is not identical with *Oe. neglecta* Schl. Whether the Lord Howe burrowing *Oestrelata* is identical with the Norfolk Island species, I cannot say. Hunter's comparison with the puffin of England refers to the *Puffinus puffinus* Linné, which was called by Edwards(1764) "the puffin of the Isle of Man"; obviously, he had *Puffinus griseus* Gm., in his mind. In the Tab. Enc. Méth. i.(p.75, 1791), under *P. grisea*, Bonaterre gives a translation of Phillip's account of the Norfolk Island Petrel. That account was probably prepared by Latham, as those of most of the other birds were, and it is copied almost word for word in Latham's works.



Mr. Hull notes that a paper on the Birds of Norfolk Island, by A. von Pelzeln, in the Sitzungs. Kaiserl. Akad. Wissen. Wien, (xli., pp.319-332, 1860) is not available in Sydney. A short summary may therefore be acceptable. Twenty-one species are recorded, the majority names only. These are :—

*Astur approximans* Vig. & Horsf., *Climacteris scandens* Temm., *Zosterops tenuirostris* Gould, *Zosterops albogularis* Gould, *Gerygone modesta*, n.sp., (p.320), *Turdus poliocephalus* Lath., *Rhipidura assimilis*, n.sp., (p.320), *Pachycephala longirostris* Gould, *Campephaga longicaudata*, n.sp., (p.321), *Aplonis obscurus* Dubus, *Nestor norfolcensis*, n.sp., (p.322, Plate of head), *Hemiphaga spadicea* Lath., *Leucosarcia picata* Lath., *Charadrius xanthocheilus* Wagler, *Limosa baueri* Natterer, *Totanus glottis* Linné, *Notornis* (?) *alba* White, *Anas superciliosa* Gmel., *Puffinus chlororhynchus* Less, *Procellaria atlantica* Gould, *Phaëthon phaenicurus* Gmel.

The name *assimilis* given to the *Rhipidura* was changed to *pelzelni* by Gray, (Ibis, 1862, p.226) on account of a prior use of the name *assimilis*. *Campephaga longicaudata* Pelzeln, is a synonym of *Diaphoropterus leucopygius* Gould. The figure given of the head of *Nestor norfolcensis* is obviously that of a deformed bird; and, as the extreme variability of species of that genus is well known, the name seems superfluous. However, Rothschild has advanced the theory that it may have been a native of Lord Howe Island; he observes that it seems quite unlikely that different species should be represented on Phillip and Norfolk Islands. In favor of this view we have mention in Lieut. Watts's account of "parrots" as well as parroquets when Lord Howe Island was discovered. Though Mr. Hull gives Norfolk Island alone as the habitat of the extinct *Hemiphaga spadicea* Lath., it is obvious that it was formerly as common on Lord Howe Island.

When putting together these notes, I observed records of some birds which have escaped Mr. Hull's notice. In the Records of the Australian Museum (Vol. v., p.126, 1904), North has written "Another collection of birds made by Mr. Waite on Lord Howe Island in December, 1902, contains two species that have not previously been recorded from that Island, viz., *Tringa subar-*

*quata* Guldst., and *Puffinus carneipes* Gould. A specimen of the latter was also obtained by Mr. E. H. Saunders, on the same Island, as far back as 1887." In the "Monograph of Petrels," (Pl. ii., p. 142, 1908) is written of *P. carneipes* Gould, "Mr. Ernest Saunders procured specimens on Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island"; and, on p. 144, "The specimen described is in the British Museum, and was obtained by Mr. Ernest Saunders on Norfolk Island." It would be interesting to learn whether this Petrel breeds on either of these groups, or whether the birds recorded were simply stragglers.

In the Catalogue of Birds, British Museum, xxiv., p. 352, under *Numenius cyanopus* Vieill., appears "Lord Howe Island, Sep. 8. J. Macgillivray." As on p. 364, under *Numenius variegatus* Scop., it is recorded that Macgillivray also collected that species, there can be no doubt of the accuracy of the occurrence. *N. cyanopus* should, therefore, be added to the list.

Another species, *Megalestris antarctica* Less., is mentioned in the same Catalogue (Vol. xxv, p. 321): immature skin, Norfolk Island, F. M. Rayner, Esq.